

Opinion

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Keep up pressure on tire burning

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Vermonters should not feel helpless in their fight for clean air. Many hands are working to prevent International Paper Co. from burning tires without the proper pollution-control device.

What started with a small group of concerned residents in Addison County has grown into a statewide outcry against a paper mill that, as Gov. Jim Douglas said, is "seeing how much they can legally pollute."

Last week, Sen. Jim Jeffords, I-Vt., introduced legislation to ensure people living near mills that burn tires are protected.

This is strong legislation that would effectively require International Paper to do the right thing for the environment and human health -- to install up-to-date pollution control technology.

The bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., calls for the Environmental Protection Agency to issue performance standards for fine particulates from pulp mills that switch to tire-derived fuel, with the standards no less stringent than the performance achieved by an electrostatic precipitator (ESP) or a similar device called a Kevlar baghouse fabric filter. Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., introduced similar legislation in the House.

As Jeffords noted, most U.S. pulp and paper mills that burn tires for fuel have modern pollution-control technology. Even International Paper reported to Jeffords a year ago that seven of its eight plants that burn tires have ESPs.

Vermont doesn't want to end up in an expensive court battle over this. Legal action is a last resort, but a possibility, especially after Douglas' "olive branch" offer to help the company buy an ESP was rebuffed last week.

Meanwhile, there is still time for Vermonters to speak out against the paper mill's proposed two-week test burn. Public comments will be taken by the New York Department of Conservation until Dec. 9.

Speak out Send comments about the proposed test burn at International Paper Co. to Michael McMurray, New York State Department of Conservation, Region 5 Headquarters, P.O. Box 296, Ray Brook, N.Y. 12977-0296.